

Learning What Love Means (Semiotext(e) / Native Agents)

Mathieu Lindon



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"I loved Michel as Michel, not as a father. Never did I feel the slightest jealousy or the slightest embitterment or exasperation when it came to him. It was something that no one has a right to expect from the best son or the best lover." -- from *Learning What Love Means*

Mathieu Lindon's father Jérôme Lindon was the founder of Éditions de Minuit, the legendary French publishing company that not only gave the world the nouveau roman but also nurtured two Nobel Prize winners, Samuel Beckett and Michel Simon. Lindon rebelled against his father with the full battery of a "disastrous adolescence." From the beginning, he had realized that he would not perpetuate the dynasty his father had created. For one thing, Mathieu Lindon is gay: he wouldn't create any progeny, and the line of descent would stop with him.

As this turbulent memoir reveals, it would take another literary giant -- Michel Foucault -- to reconcile Mathieu Lindon to his father's love. Over an intense six-year period that included one year of living together in Foucault's apartment on rue de Vaugirard, Lindon and Foucault enjoyed a passionate, productive friendship. Their social circle included other figures of the Parisian gay, literary, and art scenes (including Hervé Guibert and Daniel Defert), creating a satisfying, self-invented, pleasure-oriented surrogate family that eventually produced an alchemical miracle: Lindon reevaluated and accepted his father's love. Foucault's humanity and inventiveness gave Lindon the clarity and the magnanimity to accept the gifts his father had always offered.

Learning What Love Means is the story of a prodigal son's rebellion and return, an unflinching portrait of two famous literary figures and the journey taken by a third -- Lindon himself -- to achieve a genuine capacity to love.

This book won the prestigious Prix Médicis in 2011 when it was published in French.

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